



## *State of Wyoming Military Department Office of the Adjutant General*

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Dec 7, 2006

### **For immediate release**

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**WyMD-06-130**

### **Family Support Groups support holiday activities**

CHEYENNE – Families of Wyoming National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, along with members of the Wyoming National Guard Family Readiness Program, broke out the wrapping paper and the decorations to send 15 full-sized Christmas trees to troops deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

"There's just something about a big pine tree that really says 'happy holidays,'" State Family Program Director Bill Breckenridge said. "We hope these trees will be a nice change of color and a source of cheer for our men and women in combat."

The group is also sending mini trees to Soldiers and Airmen who are attached to units outside of the Wyoming National Guard.

All of the trees, big and small, will arrive complete with presents and well wishes. Families have been decorating banners, cards and sending goodies to their loved ones in conjunction with the tree shipment.

Some of the presents will provide a nice rest for their Soldiers. The Family Support Group asked families from around the state to send in family photos and pictures of other cherished memories. Once they had the photos, volunteers transferred them onto pillow cases and shipped them to the Soldiers.

While the Soldiers lie down on their new pillow cases, they can read the cards that their children and spouses made at a recent card making party.

“Events like the card making party really boost the morale of the families and the Soldiers,” Wyoming Family Assistance Center Supervisor Debbie Russell said. “The cards are a nice bridge between family and Soldier ... that one activity makes everyone smile.”

Speaking of smiling kids, the Guardian Angel Program provided presents for 159 children of deployed Soldiers and Airmen. Parties hosted by the Wyoming FAC are helping to spread a little holiday cheer.

## **Shopping for a serviceman**

Holiday cheer is something that can also come in the form of care packages and presents. If you're shopping for that special service member, there are special considerations to take.

While there are military shops that provide for many of the needs Guardsmen in Iraq have, there are still a few items that are hard to find. Russell said the number one thing Soldiers complain about is a lack of shaving cream and quality razors.

“I'm not sure why that's tough to come by, but that's what everyone we talk to seems to want, but can't find,” Russell said.

She added items that are unique to their home life are also good ideas. Homemade CDs, DVDs, pictures and game jerky are popular items.

## **AAFES is more than just a lot of letters**

If people are not sure what the Soldier or Airmen needs, they can purchase gift certificates to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service. Those gift certificates are available online at [aafes.com](http://aafes.com) and the service will mail them directly to those Soldiers. AAFES is the military equivalent of a department store and can be used by any member of the Army, Air Force, Navy or Coast Guard.

Prepaid phone cards are also a good idea. Those can also be purchased through AAFES. Phone cards and gift certificates can be purchased by anyone, not just members of the military or their families.

AAFES also has a program that allows the purchase of phone cards and gift certificates by people who just wish to donate a gift to servicemen. The donor program can be accessed through the AAFES Web site or by contacting the state's Family Support Center in Cheyenne.

## **Ho-Ho No!**

There are some things that should not be sent to Soldiers. Movies and magazines explicit in nature are definitely not allowed. Items that are explosive or are on the list of items not allowed by the U.S. Postal Service are not allowed to be sent.

The desert environment also makes some gifts a little destructive – not to mention messy. Even though it's winter, it can still reach 90 degrees or more in Iraq. That's not a good temperature for things like chocolate.

## **Mailing your package**

For people wanting to mail presents, remember, there is no deadline to give. "A belated present is way better than no present at all," Breckenridge said.

The Wyoming National Guard cannot provide names or addresses for individual Soldiers and Airmen but the Family Readiness Program can work with organizations to put them in contact with Wyoming units.